

Top US diplomat says held call with Kagame over Rwanda-DR Congo border tensions

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The United States' State Secretary Antony Blinken during his visit to Rwanda on August 11, 2022. Photo by Olivier Mugwiza

United States' State Secretary Antony Blinken said he held a phone call with Rwandan President Paul Kagame on Tuesday during which the two leaders discussed escalating tensions on the Rwanda-DR Congo border.

"I spoke with Rwandan President Kagame today to discuss the volatile situation along the border between Rwanda and the DRC," he posted on X (formerly Twitter).

The top US diplomat added, *"I shared my hope for a diplomatic solution to the tensions*

and for each side to take measures to de-escalate the situation."

Blinken also updated Kagame on the recent visit by United States' Acting Deputy Secretary Victoria Nuland to DR Congo's capital of Kinshasa to meet President Felix Tshisekedi, according to Mathew Miller, the spokesperson of the US State Department.

Diplomatic tensions between Kigali and Kinshasa have lasted decades but there had been efforts to turn a new page before ties broke again following the resurgence of the M23 rebels in eastern DR Congo in 2022, with the group blaming Congo's leaders of violating a previous peace deal.

The Congolese government claimed Rwanda was supporting the rebels, which Kigali dismissed.

On the other hand, Rwanda accused DR Congo of cooperating with the genocidal FDLR militia, a blacklisted terrorist group created and controlled by elements linked to the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda which claimed the lives of more than a million people.

The genocidal militia has in recent years launched cross-border attacks against

Rwanda, incidents which Kigali said were backed by the Congolese forces FARDC

And, just recently, Rwanda warned against DR Congo's use of pretexts to justify attacks on Rwanda.

Since July 2022, talks have been held between the two countries, with the mediation of Angola, under what has come to be known as the Luanda Process.

But, despite regional efforts to defuse tensions, the situation remains tense.

Congolese warplanes have violated Rwanda's airspace at least three times since November 2022, while rocket-shelling incidents injured civilians in northwestern Rwanda.

The DR Congo-based FDLR has launched attacks on Rwandan territory for more than 20 years and it is believed the group has recently been emboldened by support from Kinshasa.

Meanwhile, the M23 rebels have since late last year withdrawn from several locations under a separate arrangement backed by the East African Community bloc, but the process seemed to have stalled with the rebels accusing Kinshasa of renegeing on its commitments and engineering attacks on Rwandophone communities in what the group has previously described as imminent genocide.